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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their January 3-5 news coverage on the ongoing probe into former President Chen Shui-bian's legal cases, and on the economic challenges facing the Ma Ying-jeou administration in the coming year. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" discussed the six-point speech recently delivered by Chinese President Hu Jintao toward Taiwan. The article said it appears that the Ma administration is ready to accept Hu's letter summoning Ma's surrender. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," however, said Taiwan will not bite at Hu's bait. End summary.

A) "Hu's Six-Point Speech Is a Letter Summoning Ma to Surrender"

Dr. Lo Chih-cheng, associate professor at Soochow University's Political Science Department, wrote in the "Weekly Commentary" column in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] (1/4):

"Chinese President Hu Jintao delivered a speech on the last day of 2008, marking the 30th anniversary of China's [January 1, 1979] 'Message to Compatriots in Taiwan,' in which he laid out the framework for future interactions and negotiations between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. ... To summarize Hu's speech, 'one China' will serve as a principle in terms of the future development of cross-strait relations, with 'unification across the Taiwan Strait' as its final outcome and the 'one country, two systems' as its keynote. Also, China will push for the goal of making Taiwan a 'de facto' part of China on the basis of ensuring that Taiwan is a 'de jure' part of China. ...

"What is worrisome for Taiwan is that Hu's six-point speech reveals a very high degree of confidence on the part of the Beijing authorities in dealing with cross-strait issues now, and such confidence is obviously based on its judgment of the [cross-strait] situation since the Ma Ying-jeou administration took office. ... Evidently, Beijing believes that changes in Taiwan and in the international community have further consolidated the one China principle and rendered the prospect of cross-strait unification all the more plausible. ...

"It seems worrisome that the Ma administration has been using its initial agenda of 'no unification, no independence and no use of force' as a tool to cover up - or even to package - the Beijing authorities' goal of 'ultimate unification.' The result of close collaboration between the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party is to allow China to fulfill its strategic goal of achieving Taiwan's submission without having to go to war. It is very clear that in the foreseeable future, be it the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement or a peace accord, both will be included in the agenda for cross-strait talks. It appears that the Ma administration is ready to accept Hu's six-point letter summoning his surrender. But what about the views of the Taiwan people? Are they ready to accept that as well? ..."

B) "Taiwan Won't Bite at Hu's Bait"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (1/5):

"... Although Hu says the CCP is willing to have contact with different Taiwanese parties, the premise for such contact is that the parties must stop working for Taiwanese independence. This is tantamount to requesting surrender and it is unlikely that Taiwan's democratic parties would accept such a condition. Hu may have given his own 'Message to Compatriots in Taiwan,' but it was surely directed at CCP cadres, not the Taiwanese public. While the premise and content of the speech may have held some novelty value, it was but a rehash of old clichés for Taiwan. Hu may also have offered Taiwan a few more tidbits in the shape of participation in international organizations, a peace agreement and economic cooperation, but this does not change the fact that these offers are mere bait. If Taiwan bites rather than shows caution and restraint, the consequences will be dire."

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